



June 12, 2009

Teacher Snapshots

Two years ago today I was fortunate to be appointed Chancellor of the DC Public Schools. Since then, I have met and heard from so many of you as our shared effort of advancing student achievement in our nation's capital has gone forward. Thank you for your ideas, your work, and for the genuine commitment you have shown to empowering children toward positive futures for their lives.

On this day and every day, I know that two things inspire me the most about doing my job. The first is listening to students. The second is witnessing the magic that happens between teacher and student in a classroom engaged in learning.

Thank you to the teachers in this school system who get up every day to do what I feel is the hardest and most important work in this country. I know that everyone who reads this cannot see the powerful work that is happening in classrooms in this city, and I would like to share what I think is the second best thing to visiting our classrooms: hearing directly from our teachers, in their words, about teaching.

Today we will begin to regularly publish Teacher Snapshots so that many beyond the doors of our own classrooms can capture a glimpse and an appreciation of the talent and dedication that is working to create that learning magic in our schools. The first three are featured in this issue of the Chancellor's Notes: Alva Hanson, a 9th grade environmental science teacher at Youth Engagement Academy, Rosalind Hayes, a pre-kindergarten teacher at Amidon-Bowen Elementary School, and Kelly Emminger, a first grade teacher at Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School.

Every week we will add another snapshot, highlighting another teacher. You can find these on <http://www.k12.dc.us/staff/teacher-snapshots/>. I hope you will enjoy them, and I hope you will check back every week to read more.

Thank you again to all teachers as you let go of one group of children you have guided this year, and prepare for the next new opportunity with another.

Sincerely,

Michelle Rhee

Alva Hanson

*Youth Engagement Academy
9th grade Environmental Science
Teacher for 10 years*

1. Why did you become a teacher?

I had actually wanted to go into advertising at first. But after working with a group of eight middle-schoolers through a non-profit in Connecticut called LEAP, advertising just didn't feel as honorable to me.

People were saying I was doing a really great job with the kids, and I took it to heart. That inspired me to change my major from advertising to biology and education, and I've never looked back. [Click here to read the complete profile.](#)

2. Who was your favorite teacher and why?

Mrs. Barrett was my 10th grade biology teacher. Science was easy for me so I didn't feel like I had to be there the whole time anyway. I was a wrestler and had to cut weight, so I would always be late to class trying to exercise and lose that last pound before weigh-in.

Mrs. Barrett set me straight and told me that couldn't keep happening. I tried to tell her that I had to cut weight and was doing okay in her class already.

She said, "If I help you find a way to participate in class and still have some time to make weight, will you come on time?" So, I said yes.

She was a good teacher because she really catered to the kind of kid I was, making me do my work but also letting me do all these weird wrestling things while class was going on. I was never late after that, and she even started going to my matches to support me.



3. Three adjectives that describe your job:

Tough, dynamic, rewarding.

4. What is one thing that you wish someone had told you when you were a first-year teacher?

That everyone doesn't have the same intentions. I wish I had known as a first-year teacher that there were people in education who weren't fully invested in the kids.

Some folks just see it as a job, but people who really care about the kids don't get into education for the paycheck. I would have had a different mindset as a beginning teacher and might not have gotten so frustrated with the educational system. It's something I'm still working through now.



5. What's one thing your students have taught you about being a better teacher?

Oh...to be flexible. Very flexible. Nothing is written in stone in the classroom

6. Tell a little about a time when a student's accomplishments completely exceeded your expectations. Or, tell a little about a time when you were inspired by a student.

I had one student, a seventh-grader, who was going through a lot of hardships. He had moved from abroad and had gone through some really rough experiences in his home country. His English wasn't very good, and I was basically teaching him life science as a second language.

But he had that drive to want to be better and was always there with his translation book, working twice as hard as everyone else to learn science while still trying to master English. That he worked so hard to get the basics right inspired me to work as hard as I could to help him. I've never had a student that hungry to learn.

7. Why is teaching an incredibly important job?

It's important because we, as teachers, are on the front line as far as society is concerned: we get everybody ready for their jobs. You can't be president—or chancellor of Washington, DC's schools—without making your way through some good teachers to get to where you are.

We, as teachers, are going to inspire people who will go beyond what we ourselves can do. I would love to explore the universe but never will myself. Teaching is a way to have a hand in that, too. We make and we shape the rest of the world.

[This snapshot is also available online.](#)

[Click here to view all snapshots.](#)



Rosalind Hayes

Amidon-Bowen ES
Pre-kindergarten
Teacher for 10 years

1. Why did you become a teacher?

Because I wanted to give something back to my community. I am from Baltimore, and while I majored in four or five things in college, I knew I wanted to do something with families and communities, and I settled down on children and majored in art education. That's when I decided to be an art teacher.

2. Who was your favorite teacher and why?

Ms. Sherr, because she was so fair. She gave me a chance and encouraged my artwork. I have always been artistically inclined and she patiently encouraged this. I was a kind of hyper child but she gave me that release through art that cut down on my hyperactivity. She was a very good influence.



[To read the complete snapshot click here.](#)

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Kelly Emminger

Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School
1st Grade
Teacher for 10 years

1. Why did you become a teacher?

I started off with Teach for America 10 years ago. Very soon after I started teaching—even when things were falling apart in the classroom—I realized that I really enjoyed teaching and wanted to get it right. When things did click, I knew this was what I wanted to do. I loved the students and working with them, but I also liked organizing information, finding new ways to present it, developing assessments...I loved all of the mechanics of teaching. I did have to work to get better at it though.

2. Who was your favorite teacher and why?

Ms. Intriago was my teacher for the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. She taught Language Arts and Social Studies. She introduced topics and subject matter and approaches to thinking in ways I had never experienced before. We were studying world cultures and world literature and I had known almost nothing about any of it. She made it so accessible and opened up the world to me. Every day was exciting and interesting in her class.



Photo by Jason Colston

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